

Contents

History and literature

Speakers

Phonology

Consonant phonemes

Vowel phonemes

Germination

Allophones

Syllables

Grammar

Typical grammatical features

Innovations

Writing system

See also

References

Bibliography

External links

History and literature

The earliest written example of Tigrinya is a text of local laws found in the district of Logosarda, Debub Region in Southern Eritrea, which dates from the 13th century.

Tigrinya (along with Arabic) was one of Eritrea's official languages during its short-lived federation with Ethiopia; in 1958 it was replaced by the Southern Ethiopic language Amharic prior to its annexation. Upon Eritrea's

Tigrinya	
ትግርኛ <i>tigrīññā</i>	
Pronunciation	/t̪ɨɡɾɨ̌ɲa/
Native to	Eritrea, Ethiopia
Region	Tigray, Eritrea
Ethnicity	Tigrinyas
Native speakers	9 million (2011–2012) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Afro-Asiatic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">South Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ethiopic<ul style="list-style-type: none">North Ethiopic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ge'ez<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tigrinya</div>
Writing system	Ge'ez script (Tigrigna alphabet)
Official status	
Official language in	 Eritrea
Recognised minority language in	 Ethiopia <div> Tigray</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ti (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ti)
ISO 639-2	tir (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=449)
ISO 639-3	tir
Glottolog	tigr1271 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/tigr1271) ^[2]

independence in 1991, Tigrinya retained the status of working language in the country, the only state in the world to date to recognize Tigrinya on a national level.

Speakers

There is no general name for the people who speak Tigrinya ተግርኛ. In Ethiopia, a native of Tigray is referred to in Tigrinya as *tigrāwāy* (male), *tigrāweytī* (female), *tigrāwōt* or, more commonly, *tegaru* (plural). In Eritrea, Tigrinya speakers are officially known as the *Bihére-Tigrigna* ("nation of Tigrinya speakers"). Bihér roughly means nation in the ethnic sense of the word in Tigrinya, Tigre, Amharic and Ge'ez. The Jeberti in Eritrea also speak Tigrinya.

Tigrinya is the most widely spoken language in Eritrea (see Demographics of Eritrea), and the fourth most spoken language in Ethiopia after Amharic, Somali and Oromo. It is also spoken by large immigrant communities around the world, in countries including Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. In Australia, Tigrinya is one of the languages broadcast on public radio via the multicultural Special Broadcasting Service.^[7]

Tigrinya dialects differ phonetically, lexically, and grammatically.^[8] No dialect appears to be accepted as a standard.

Phonology

For the representation of Tigrinya sounds, this article uses a modification of a system that is common (though not universal) among linguists who work on Ethiopian Semitic languages, but differs somewhat from the conventions of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Consonant phonemes

Tigrinya has a fairly typical set of phonemes for an Ethiopian Semitic language. That is, there is a set of ejective consonants and the usual seven-vowel system. Unlike many of the modern Ethiopian Semitic languages, Tigrinya has preserved the two pharyngeal consonants which were apparently part of the ancient Ge'ez language and which, along with [x'], a velar or uvular ejective fricative, make it easy to distinguish spoken Tigrinya from related languages such as Amharic, though not from Tigre, which has also maintained the pharyngeal consonants.

The charts below show the phonemes of Tigrinya. The sounds are shown using the same system for representing the sounds as in the rest of the article. When the IPA symbol is different, it is indicated in square brackets. The consonant /v/ appears in parentheses because it occurs only in recent borrowings from European languages.

The fricative sounds [x], [xʷ], [xʰ] and [xʷʰ] occur as allophones.

Consonants								
		Bilabial/ Labiodental	Dental	Palato-alveolar/ Palatal	Velar		Pharyngeal	Glottal
					Plain	Lab.		
Nasal		m	n	ñ [ɲ]				
Plosive	voiceless	p	t	č [tʃ]	c [k]	cw [kʷ]		ʻ [ʔ]
	voiced	b	d	ǧ [dʒ]	g [g]	gw [gʷ]		
	ejective	pʰ [pʰ]	tʰ [tʰ]	čʰ [tʃʰ]	cʰ [kʰ]	cwʰ [kʷʰ]		
Fricative	voiceless	f	s	š [ʃ]	(x)	(xw) [xʷ]	ħ [ħ]	h
	voiced	(v)	z	ž [ʒ]			ʕ [ʕ]	
	ejective		sʰ [sʰ]		(xʰ) [xʰ]	(xwʰ) [xʷʰ]		
Approximant			l	y [j]		w		
Rhotic			r					

Vowel phonemes

The sounds are shown using the same system for representing the sounds as in the rest of the article. When the IPA symbol is different, it is indicated in square brackets.

Vowels

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>Close</u>	i	ə [ɨ]	u
<u>Mid</u>	e	ä [ɐ]	o
<u>Open</u>		a	

Gemination

Gemination, the doubling of a consonantal sound, is meaningful in Tigrinya, i.e. it affects the meaning of words. While gemination plays an important role in the morphology of the Tigrinya verb, it is normally accompanied by other marks. But there is a small number of pairs of words which are only differentiable from each other by gemination, e.g. /k' ɐrɐbɐ/, ('he brought forth'); /k' ɐrɐbɐ/, ('he came closer'). All the consonants, with the exception of the pharyngeal and glottal, can be geminated.^[9]

Allophones

The velar consonants /k/ and /k' / are pronounced differently when they appear immediately after a vowel and are not geminated. In these circumstances, /k/ is pronounced as a velar fricative. /k' / is pronounced as a fricative, or sometimes as an affricate. This fricative or affricate is more often pronounced further back, in the uvular place of articulation (although it is represented in this article as [x']). All of these possible realizations - velar ejective fricative, uvular ejective fricative, velar ejective affricate and uvular ejective affricate - are cross-linguistically very rare sounds.

Since these two sounds are completely conditioned by their environments, they can be considered allophones of /k/ and /k' /. This is especially clear from verb roots in which one consonant is realized as one or the other allophone depending on what precedes it. For example, for the verb meaning *cry*, which has the triconsonantal root [bky], there are forms such as ጥብካይ /məbkaj/ ('to cry') and በኸየ /bɛxɛjɐ/ ('he cried'), and for the verb meaning 'steal', which has the triconsonantal root [srk'], there are forms such as ይሰርቁ /jəsɐrk' u/ ('they steal') and ይሰርቁ /jəsɐrrɛx' / ('he steals').

What is especially interesting about these pairs of phones is that they are distinguished in Tigrinya orthography. Because allophones are completely predictable, it is quite unusual for them to be represented with distinct symbols in the written form of a language.

Syllables

A Tigrinya syllable may consist of a consonant-vowel or a consonant-vowel-consonant sequence. When three consonants (or one geminated consonant and one simple consonant) come together within a word, the cluster is broken up with the introduction of an epenthetic vowel ə, and when two consonants (or one geminated consonant) would otherwise end a word, the vowel i appears after them, or (when this happens because of the presence of a suffix) ə is introduced before the suffix. For example,

- ክብዱ *käbdi* 'stomach', ልቢ *ləbbi* 'heart'
- -äy 'my', ክብደይ *käbdäy* 'my stomach', ልቤ *ləbbäy* 'my heart'
- -ka 'your (masc.)', ክብደኻ *käbdəxa* 'your (masc.) stomach', ልብኻ *ləbbəxa* 'your (masc.) heart'
- -n...-n 'and', ክብድን ልብን *käbdən ləbbən* 'stomach and heart'

Stress is neither contrastive nor particularly salient in Tigrinya. It seems to depend on gemination, but it has apparently not been systematically investigated.

Typical grammatical features

Grammatically, Tigrinya is a typical Ethiopian Semitic (ES) language in most ways:

- A Tigrinya noun is treated as either masculine or feminine. However, most inanimate nouns do not have a fixed gender.
- Tigrinya nouns have plural, as well as singular, forms, though the plural is not obligatory when the linguistic or pragmatic context makes the number clear. As in Tigre and Ge'ez (as well as Arabic), noun plurals may be formed through internal changes ("broken" plural) as well as through the addition of suffixes. For example, ፈረስ *fārās* 'horse', ኣፍራስ *'afras* 'horses'.
- Adjectives behave in most ways like nouns. Most Tigrinya adjectives, like those in Tigre and Ge'ez, have feminine and plural (both genders) forms. For example, ጽቡቕ *s'əbbux* 'good (m.sg.)', ጽቡቕቲ *s'əbbəx'ti* 'good (f.sg.)', ጽቡቕቲ *s'əbbux'at* 'good (pl.)'
- Within personal pronouns and subject agreement inflections on verbs, gender is distinguished in second person as well as third. For example, ተዛረብ *tāzarāb* 'speak! (m.sg.)', ተዛረቢ *tāzarābi* 'speak (f.sg.)'.
- Possessive adjectives take the form of noun suffixes: ገዛ *gāza* 'house', ገዛይ *gāza-y* 'my house', ገዛኺ *gāza-xi* 'your (f.sg.) house'.
- Verbs are based on consonantal roots, most consisting of three consonants: {sbr} 'break', ሰበረ *sābārā* 'he broke', ይሰብር *yəsābbər* 'he breaks', ምስብር *məsbar* 'to break'.
- Within the tense system there is a basic distinction between the perfective form, conjugated with suffixes and denoting the past, and the imperfective form, conjugated with prefixes and in some cases suffixes, and denoting the present or future: ሰበረ *sābār-u* 'they broke', ይሰብሩ *yə-sābr-u* 'they break'.
- As in Ge'ez and Amharic, there is also a separate "gerundive" form of the verb, conjugated with suffixes and used to link verbs within a sentence: ገዳፍካ ተዛረብ *gādifka tāzarāb* 'stop (that) and speak (m.sg.)'.
- Verbs also have a separate jussive/imperative form, similar to the imperfective: ይሰበሩ *yə-sbār-u* 'let them break'.
- Through the addition of derivational morphology (internal changes to verb stems and/or prefixes), verbs may be made passive, reflexive, causative, frequentative, reciprocal, or reciprocal causative: ፈለጡ *fālāt'-u* 'they knew', ተፈልጡ *tä-fält'-u* 'they were known', ኣፈልጡ *'a-fält'-u* 'they caused to know (they introduced)', ተፋለጡ *tä-falāt'-u* 'they knew each other', ኣፋለጡ *'a-f-falāt'-u* 'they caused to know each other'.
- Verbs may take direct object and prepositional pronoun suffixes: ፈለጠኒ *fālāt'ä-nni* 'he knew me', ፈለጠለይ *fālāt'ä-lläy* 'he knew for me'.
- Negation is expressed through the prefix *ay-* and, in independent clauses, the suffix *-n*: ኣይፈለጠን *ay-fālāt'ä-n* 'he didn't know'.
- The copula and the verb of existence in the present are irregular: ኣሎ *'allo* 'there is, he exists', ኣየ *əyyu* 'he is', የለን or የልቦን *yällän* or *yälbən* 'there isn't, he doesn't exist', ኣይኮነን *ayk 'änän* 'he isn't', ነበረ *näbärä* 'he existed, he was, there was', ይኸውን *yə-xäwwən* 'he will be', ይነበር *yə-näbbər* 'he will exist, there will be'.
- The verb of existence together with object suffixes for the possessor expresses possession ('have') and obligation ('must'): ኣሎኒ *'allo-nni* 'I have, I must' (lit. 'there is (to) me').
- Relative clauses are expressed by a prefix attached to the verb: ዝፈለጠ *zə-fälāt'ä* 'who knew'
- Cleft sentences, with relative clauses normally following the copula, are very common: መን ኣየ ዝፈለጠ *mən əyyu zə-fälāt'ä* 'who knew?' (lit. 'who is he who knew?').
- There is an accusative marker used on definite direct objects. In Tigrinya this is the prefix *nə-*. For example, ሓጽብ ንኣልማዝ ረኺቡዎ *ḥag 'äs nə'almaz rāxibuwwa* 'Hagos met Almaz'.
- As in other **modern** Ethiopian Semitic languages, the default word order in clauses is subject–object–verb, and noun modifiers usually (though not always in Tigrinya) precede their head nouns.

Innovations

Tigrinya grammar is unique within the Ethiopian Semitic language family in several ways:

- For second person pronouns, there is a separate vocative form, used to get a person's attention: ንሰኻ *nəssəxa* 'you (m.sg.)', ኣታ *'atta* 'you! (m.sg.)'.
- There is a definite article, related (as in English) to the demonstrative adjective meaning 'that': እታ ኣል *'əta g 'al* 'the girl'.
- The gerundive form is used for past tense, as well as for the linking function as in Ge'ez and Amharic: ተዛሪቡ *tāzaribu* '(he) speaking, he spoke'.
- Yes-no questions are marked by the particle ደ *do* following the questioned word: ሓፍተይሩ ርኢኹ *ḥaftäydo rə'ixi* 'did you (f.sg.) see my sister?'.
- The negative circumfix *ay- -n* may mark nouns, pronouns, and adjectives as well as verbs: ኣይኣነን *ay-'anä-n* 'not me', ኣይዓብይን *ay'abəy-ən* 'not big'.
- Tigrinya has an unusually complex tense–aspect–mood system, with many nuances achieved using combinations of the three basic aspectual forms (perfect, imperfect, gerundive) and various auxiliary verbs including the copula (እዩ *əyyu*, etc.), the verb of existence (ኣሎ *'allo*, etc.), and the verbs ነበረ *nəbärä* 'exist, live', ኮነ *konä* 'become', ጸነሐ *s'änhe* 'stay'.
- Tigrinya has compound prepositions corresponding to the preposition–postposition compounds found in Amharic: ኣብ ልዕሊ ዓራት ***ab la'li*** 'arat 'on (top of) the bed', ኣብ ትሕቲ ዓራት ***ab təhti*** 'arat 'under the bed'.
- Unlike most Ethiopian Semitic languages, Tigrinya has only one set of applicative suffixes, used both for the dative and benefactive and for locative and adversative senses: ተቐሚጣሉ *täx'ämmi't-a-llu* 'she sat down **for him**' or 'she sat down **on it**' or 'she sat down **to his detriment**'.

Writing system

Tigrinya is written in the Ge'ez script, originally developed for Ge'ez, also called Ethiopic. The Ge'ez script is an abugida: each symbol represents a consonant+vowel syllable, and the symbols are organized in groups of similar symbols on the basis of both the consonant and the vowel.^[9] In the table below the columns are assigned to the seven vowels of Tigrinya (and Ge'ez); they appear in the traditional order. The rows are assigned to the consonants, again in the traditional order.

For each consonant in an abugida, there is an unmarked symbol representing that consonant followed by a canonical or inherent vowel. For the Ge'ez abugida, this canonical vowel is *ä*, the first column in the table. However, since the pharyngeal and glottal consonants of Tigrinya (and other Ethiopian Semitic languages) cannot be followed by this vowel, the symbols in the first column in the rows for those consonants are pronounced with the vowel *a*, exactly as in the fourth row. These redundant symbols are falling into disuse in Tigrinya and are shown with a **dark gray** background in the table. When it is necessary to represent a consonant with no following vowel, the *consonant+ə* form is used (the symbol in the sixth column). For example, the word *'əntay* 'what?' is written እንታይ, literally 'ə-nə-ta-yə.

Since some of the distinctions that were apparently made in Ge'ez have been lost in Tigrinya, there are two rows of symbols each for the consonants /h/, /s/, and /s'/. In Eritrea, for /s/ and /s'/, at least, one of these has fallen into disuse in Tigrinya and is now considered old-fashioned. These less-used series are shown with a dark gray background in the chart.

The orthography does not mark gemination, so the pair of words *k'ärräbä* 'he approached', *k'äräbä* 'he was near' are both written ቀረበ. Since such minimal pairs are very rare, this presents no problem to readers of the language.

Tigrinya writing system

[illegible]

	ከ	ኹ	ኪ	ካ	ኬ	ኸ	ኾ	ኰ	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ	ኵ
x	ኸ	ኹ	ኪ	ካ	ኬ	ኸ	ኾ	ኰ	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ	ኵ
w	ዐ	ዑ	ዒ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
‘	ዐ	ዑ	ዒ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
z	ዘ	ዙ	ዚ	ዛ	ዞ	ዠ	ዡ					
ž	ዘ	ዙ	ዚ	ዛ	ዞ	ዠ	ዡ					
y	የ	ዩ	ዪ	ያ	ዬ	ይ	ዮ					
d	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ					
ǵ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ					
g	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ጐ	጑	ጒ	ጓ	ጔ
ṭ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ					
ṣ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ					
p	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ					
s	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ					
ṣ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ					
f	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ					
p	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ					
	ä	u	i	a	e	(ə)	o	wä	wi	wa	we	wə

See also

- UCLA Language Materials Project

References

1. Tigrinya (<https://www.ethnologue.com/17/language/tir/>) at *Ethnologue* (17th ed., 2013)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Tigrinya" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tigr1271>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. "Tigrinya language" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tigrinya-language>). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
4. The Bible in Tigrinya, United Bible society, 1997
5. Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, Oxford University Press, 1960
6. Ministry of Information (1944) *The First to be Freed—The record of British military administration in Eritrea and Somalia, 1941-1943*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
7. "ቀንዲ ገጽ ትግርኛ" (<https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/tigrinya?language=ti>). *SBS Your Language*.
8. Leslau, Wolf (1941) *Documents Tigrigna (Éthiopien Septentrional): Grammaire et Textes*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck.
9. Rehman, Abdel. English Tigrigna Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Tigrinya Language: (Asmara) Simon Wallenberg Press. Introduction Pages to the Tigrinya Language

Bibliography

- Amanuel Sahle (1998) *Sāwasāsəw Təgrəñña bəsāfiḥ*. Lawrenceville, NJ, USA: Red Sea Press. ISBN 1-56902-096-5
- Dan'el Täxlu Rāda (1996, Eth. Cal.) *Zābānawī sāwasəw k'w'ank w'a Təgrəñña*. Mäx'älä
- Rehman, Abdel. English Tigrigna Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Tigrinya Language: (Asmara) Simon Wallenberg Press. Introduction Pages to the Tigrinya Language ISBN 1-84356-006-2
- Eritrean People's Liberation Front (1985) *Dictionary, English-Tigrigna-Arabic*. Rome: EPLF.
- ----- (1986) *Dictionary, Tigrigna-English, mesgebe qalat tigrinya englizenya*. Rome: EPLF.
- Kane, Thomas L. (2000) *Tigrinya-English Dictionary* (2 vols). Springfield, VA: Dunwoody Press. ISBN 1-881265-68-4
- Leslau, Wolf (1941) *Documents tigrigna: grammaire et textes*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck.
- Mason, John (Ed.) (1996) *Sāwasəsəw Təgrəñña, Tigrinya Grammar*. Lawrenceville, NJ, USA: Red Sea Press. ISBN 0-932415-20-2 (ISBN 0-932415-21-0, paperback)
- Praetorius, F. (1871) *Grammatik der Tigriñasprache in Abessinien*. Halle. ISBN 3-487-05191-5 (1974 reprint)
- Tāxästā Täxlä et al. (1989, Eth. Cal.) *Māzgābā k'alat Təgrəñña bə-Təgrəñña*. Addis Ababa: Nəgd matämiya dərəğğət.
- Ullendorff, E. (1985) *A Tigrinya Chrestomathy*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner. ISBN 3-515-04314-4
- Ze'im Girma (1983) *Ləsanä Ag'azi*. Asmara: Government Printing Press.

External links

- Tigrinya classes for children of Tigrinya-speaking immigrants in Sweden (<http://modersmal.skolutveckling.se/tigrinya/>), including teaching materials.
- Tigrigna online (<http://www.memhr.org/tigrigna/index.shtml>), includes an online English-Tigrinya dictionary.
- a collection of proverbs in Tigrinya (<http://www.good-amharic-books.com/onebook.php?bookID=865>)
- teaches Tigrinya using Tigrinya words written in the English alphabet (<http://www.tigrinyateacher.com>)
- Sites with Tigrinya text or sound files (all require a Ge'ez Unicode font such as [GF Zemen Unicode \(ftp://ftp.ethiopic.org/pub/fonts/TrueType/gfzemenu.ttf\)](http://ftp.ethiopic.org/pub/fonts/TrueType/gfzemenu.ttf)).
 - Asmarino (<http://news9.asmarino.com/>): Eritrean exile site.
 - Meskerem (<http://www.meskerem.net/>): "Eritrean opposition" website.
 - Eritrean government site with links to *Haddas Ertra* (http://www.shabait.com/staging/publish/category_0012.html), the daily Tigrinya newspaper in Eritrea.

- Christian recordings in Tigrinya (<http://globalrecordings.net/language/204>): [Global Recordings \(http://globalrecordings.net\)](http://globalrecordings.net) website.
 - Tigrina Learning and Playing Game Board - **ጸዊታ ፍልጠት** (<http://www.filtet.org>): It provides for playful learning of the Ge'ez script and all languages which are written with it.^[1] (<http://www.erikids.net>)
 - [The Ethiopic Alphabet \(http://www.ethiopic.com/ethiopic_alphabet.htm\)](http://www.ethiopic.com/ethiopic_alphabet.htm)
-

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tigrinya_language&oldid=969004086"

This page was last edited on 22 July 2020, at 20:22 (UTC).

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.